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Testimony of the Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center in Opposition to S.B. 197

March 9, 2010

My name is Nancy Prescott and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center (CPAC), a statewide non-profit organization that provides information and training to parents of children with disabilities. Our goal is to prepare parents so they can effectively advocate for their children who require special education services.

We strongly oppose S.B. 197 which proposes another two year extension allowing local school districts to continue using out of school suspension for disciplining students for a wide range of offenses. Our interest in opposing this bill is directly related to the data which shows that students with disabilities are two times more likely to be suspended than other students attending public schools. Removing any student from their daily learning environment places students at significantly higher risk for school failure, drop out and future incarceration. To use this measure with students who already have known challenges with learning and engagement in the school setting only increases the likelihood of poor student outcomes.

Our knowledge of proven behavior intervention strategies and supports that work with all students, including students with disabilities, indicates that implementing systems of positive behavior supports are a much more effective and cost-effective plan of action. We believe that the original intent of language which would eliminate the use of out of school suspension, for all but the most dangerous of school disciplinary offenses, has been misinterpreted by local school districts. Creating segregated setting and hiring additional personnel could and should be avoided. We believe that all school staff should be trained and supported in school wide programs that promote respect, clear behavior expectations and opportunities for engaging all students.

Excluding students from school does nothing to promote the kind of active student engagement that our own State Department of Education is promoting as one of the cornerstones of CT's secondary school reform agenda. There will be no cost saving to our communities, our families and ultimately to our students if we do not choose to implement proven practices that will bolster student achievement and teach all of our children to become contributing members of society.

Please send a message to our local school districts that encourages them to develop and support effective student engagement programs and not rely on ineffective discipline procedures. Please do not extend the out of school suspension provisions as presented in S.B. #197.

Thank you for your time and consideration.